

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CAREER UNCERTAINTY IN COLLEGE  
FRESHMEN

By

Amber A. Sinz

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Investigation Advisor

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
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The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
Menomonie, WI 54751

ABSTRACT

Sinz	Amber	A
(Writer) (Last Name)	(First)	(Initial)
<u>Factors that Influence Career Uncertainty in College Freshmen</u>		
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Career development is a lifelong process that can be fostered through education programs at all levels, but specifically during the beginning of one's college years. It is very common for college freshmen to ponder about their choice of major and to pick a specific career during semester one of college. Therefore it is extremely important for colleges to offer career guidance aimed to help students make more informed and consequently better educational and career choices. Within this study will be a review of literature that compares and contrasts research of factors that influence career uncertainty at the early stages of college. Recommendations will be made for counselors to help aid them in their role of assisting students struggling with uncertainty.

The purpose of this study is to investigate factors that influence career uncertainty of college freshmen at the University of Wisconsin-Stout Menomonie, Wisconsin and to make recommendations that will assist counselors/advisors with early preparation of students.

The objectives are clearly stated:

1. To identify the demographic antecedents of career indecision that exists.
2. To determine if there are commonalities in attitudes on educational and occupational plans in college freshmen. Additionally, data will be looked at according to gender to see if any differences exist.
3. To identify effective recommendations/interventions that will allow counselors/advisors to better prepare students for their college education and life-long career decision making.

Data will be collected from students in the class TRDIS-101-002 Seminar in Career Exploration during the fall of 2002 at the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter using the Career Decision Scale (CDS).

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

#### **Career Development**

College is often a natural expectation or the prevailing trend to a student's future after high school. Our parents, teachers, and friends have urged us to attend college. Many college students end up attending college and not knowing why or what they are intending to study. For many that makes the college years a crucial time for career-related decision-making. College students are faced with the need to choose an academic major, as well as to develop career goals for the future. Career indecision is often thought of as a developmental phase through which college students pass on the road to making career choice.

Harold Howe (cited in Sheils, McGee, Boyd, & Monroe, 1976), the former US Commissioner of Education, conveyed the significance of early career development in relation to college. He stressed:

Teenagers go to college to be with their boyfriends and girlfriends; they go because they can't think of anything else to do; they go because their parents want them to and sometimes because their parents don't want them to; they go to find themselves, or to find a husband, or to get away from home, and sometimes even to find out about the world in which they live. (p. 64)

The career development process is one that needs to start at an early age. Learning about different careers early will help students have better understanding of the types of jobs they may want to explore. This career exploration process may start formally as early as middle school and should continue throughout high school with



hopes to narrow their decisions before they decide to apply to colleges. The career decision process is as varied as the people who make those decisions. When does the process of career planning begin? What are the causes of uncertainty? What is influencing college students today as they plan for their future career? What can counselors/advisors do to help students explore options and better understand this life-long process? Does academic standing, family background or socio-economic status appear to be a link to uncertainty? Answers for each of these questions would be useful when helping students make career decisions.

While not a new occurrence, career uncertainty among college students remains a constant challenge. According to Rosenbaum (2001), a national survey revealed that nearly all high school seniors (95 percent) plan to attend college. Studies have also shown that approximately 20 percent of these students who attend a four year college are undecided as a freshmen (Hayes, 1997). This transition from high school to college may be extremely difficult for many students, leaving them with unanswered questions and a feeling of hopelessness when it comes to choosing a major or career area.

The question that needs to be asked is whether or not students are utilizing the resources on their campus to assist them with their career indecision. Many schools, such as the University of Wisconsin-Stout, have programs specifically designed for students who are undecided about a major and are considering a career in two or three diverse fields. A course may be taken in Career Exploration so students can explore their interests, talents, and the career decision-making process, as well as to develop an understanding of the forces which are shaping the economy, job market, and the world. Also, as part of the class, students have an opportunity for individual guidance with

faculty and staff with experience in career and student development. Counselors usually suggest that students take part in job shadowing for a more hands-on experience which may help a student decide whether or not that is the career they want to further explore.

While colleges and universities shoulder much of the responsibility for guiding students through all of these career decision-making processes, the researcher believes that it is extremely important to look at the factors that contribute to career uncertainty of college freshmen. It is hoped through this study, the researcher can make recommendations that will assist counselors/advisors at the college level with early preparation of students to help provide them with a solid foundation for making career decisions.

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study is to investigate factors that influence career uncertainty of college freshmen at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, Wisconsin and make recommendations that will assist counselors/advisors with early preparation of students. Data will be collected from students in the class TRDIS-101-002 Seminar in Career Exploration during the fall of 2002 at the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter using the Career Decision Scale (CDS).

### **Research Objectives**

These are the research objectives of this study.

1. To identify the demographic antecedents of career indecision that exists.
2. To determine if there are commonalities in attitudes on educational and occupational plans in college freshmen. Additionally, data will be looked at according to gender to see if any differences exist.

3. To identify effective recommendations/interventions that will allow counselors/advisors to better prepare students for their college education and life-long career decision making.

### **Definition of Terms**

These terms are defined as they apply in the research.

**Antecedents of Career Indecision** – gender and year in school.

**Career Decided-Confirmation** – “individuals who are able to specify a choice, but wish to confirm or clarify the appropriateness of their choice by contrasting it with other possible choices” (Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G.W., Reardon, R.C., & Lenz, J. G., 2000, p.12).

**Career Decided-Implementation** – “individuals who are able to specify a choice but who need help in implementing their choice” (Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G.W., Reardon, R.C., & Lenz, J. G., 2000, p.12).

**Career Decided-Conflict Avoidance** – “individuals who present themselves as decided as a strategy for reducing conflict and stress, when in fact they have the characteristics of the undecided or indecisive individuals” (Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G.W., Reardon, R.C., & Lenz, J. G., 2000, p.13).

**Career Development** – “is the total constellation of psychological, sociological, education, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total lifespan of any given individual” (Maddy-Berstein, C., 2000, p.2).

**Career Indecisive** – “individuals who have not made a commitment to a specific occupational choice due to gaps in the knowledge necessary for choosing” (Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G.W., Reardon, R.C., & Lenz, J. G., 2000, p.13).

**Career Undecided-Deferred Choice** – “individuals who are unable to specify a choice, but have no need to make a choice at the present time” (Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G.W., Reardon, R.C., & Lenz, J. G., 2000, p.13).

**Career Undecided-Developmental** – “individuals who need to choose, are unable to commit to a choice, and who lack self, occupational, and/or decision-making knowledge” (Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G.W., Reardon, R.C., & Lenz, J. G., 2000, p.13).

**Career Undecided-Multipotential** – “individuals who have the characteristics of someone who is undecided, with the addition of having an overabundance of talents, interests, and opportunities” (Sampson, J. P., Jr., Peterson, G.W., Reardon, R.C., & Lenz, J. G., 2000, p.13).

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

It is assumed that all subjects would respond to the survey in a thoughtful and honest manner as it is related to their level of career certainty. It is also assumed that most students in the class are undecided regarding their major or career choice. A limitation in this study would be that the study is only being conducted in one classroom at the University of Wisconsin-Stout; therefore it is limited in the generalizations that can be made to other areas of Wisconsin and the United States.

The focused “degree/program” nature of University of Wisconsin-Stout caters to specific high school graduates. Indeed, some of the uncertainty common to freshmen

students attending larger universities with more diverse “degree/program” offerings may be naturally eliminated by the limited choices available on the University of Wisconsin-Stout campus.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature that compares and contrasts research in factors that influence career uncertainty among college students. In addition, studies that support the early preparation of career planning at the high school level will be reviewed. Since career exploration and development is such a crucial part of one's life, history about theorizing career choice and development will be reviewed to support this dynamic process.

#### **Theories of Career Choice and Development**

“Career development has been defined as a is the total constellation of psychological, sociological, education, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total lifespan of any given individual” (Maddy-Berstein, C., 2000, p.2). It is also a complex process involving countless theories that provide us with simplified pictures in hopes to help us narrow our career decisions or at least guide us. As stated by Issacson and Brown (2000), theories of career choice and development are needed for three primary reasons. They:

1. Facilitate the understanding of the forces that influence career choice and development;
2. Stimulate research that will help us better clarify the career choice and development process; and
3. Provide a guide to practice in the absence of empirical guidelines.

The history of career development began in 1909 with Frank Parson's book, *Choosing Your Vocation*, which explored the understanding of one's self, the requirements of the jobs available, and choice based on true logic (cited in Issacson & Brown, 2000). Parson's work emphasized the importance of active involvement in career choice. Frank Parson, a man who is considered the primary architect of vocational guidance in the United States, provided the framework of career development theory (cited in Herr & Cramer, 1996). As stated by authors Brown and Brooks (1990), Parson's view was that vocational guidance consisted of three steps:

First, a clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations and their causes. Second, a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work. Third, true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts. (p. 1)

Parson's approach helped America emerge as an industrial nation as it provided us with a foundation that represents the roots of career development theory and practice (Brown & Brooks, 1990). This foundation allowed the classification of career-decided or career-undecided (Brown & Brooks, 1990).

The growth of the testing movement was another major foundation of career development theory. Developed by Sir Francis Galton, as well as others, the testing movement received a strong influence from the work of Alfred Binet, whose efforts to develop instruments to discriminate youngsters with mental retardation from those with better intellectual talents piloted the methodology and technology enhanced later in the century (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Having this ability to measure individual traits

helped the development of career exploration. During events of the Great Depression, World War I, and World War II, many of these tests that identified individual aptitudes and traits were examined and used. This also gave the Parsonian approach a new name, renaming it “trait and factor theory” (Brown & Brooks, 1990, p. 3).

Fostered by Parson’s work, Army Classification Tests, more women entering the work force in new ways, and returning soldiers reentering the workforce was the Ginzberg, Ginzberg, Axelrad, and Herma theory in 1951. This new psychologically based theory of career development proposed the idea that occupational choice is a developmental process that occurs over a number of years, largely an irreversible process characterized by compromise because people must balance interests, aptitudes, and opportunity (Brown & Brooks, 1990). This compromise was between one’s wishes and possibilities. “The three major periods of the process have been titled the Fantasy, Tentative, and Realistic periods” (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 29). Unlike the Parson’s trait and factor theory, this theory was based on the selection of a career over a continuum of years, depending on one’s personal and psychological development. As it is largely viewed as a historical perspective today, the theory had a significant initial impact on our thinking about career development (Brown & Brooks, 1990).

The theory that overshadowed Ginzberg’s theory was Super’s life-space, life-span theory. Donald Super, one of the most influential writers of career development, often stated that his view was a “segmented” theory consisting of several related propositions (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). The propositions dealt with career patterns over the life-span. In 1953, Super presented his initial 10 propositions, added two more in 1957, and in 1990 expanded his list to 14 propositions. Within these propositions, the career pattern



concept suggested that the life cycle imposed different vocational tasks on people at various times of their lives. Eventually, a revised theory was developed by Super with a more detailed set of statements about how vocational development occurs. “Super began by making the notion of self-concept as explicit as possible” (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 113). With this notion, he believed that role modeling and observing further facilitated the development of the vocational self-concept. As self concept was a significant part of Super’s study, so was vocational maturity. Vocational maturity allowed one to develop in respect to career matters.

Social learning theory of career decision-making was introduced by Krumboltz in 1976, which stated that the learning process leads to beliefs such as self-efficacy and interests and how these impact the career decision-making process (cited in Isaacson & Brown, 2000). In essence, Krumboltz’s theory examined how an individual began with genetic abilities and interests that influenced them to the growth of career development. The theory also identified four kinds of factors that influenced career decision making: genetic endowment and special abilities, environmental conditions and events, learning experiences, and task approach skills (cited in Isaacson & Brown, 2000). In summary, Krumboltz’s theory believed that an individual was born into the world with certain genetic characteristics and as the individual encounters environmental, economic, social, and cultural events in the world they learn and change from their experiences (cited in Isaacson & Brown, 2000).

One of the strongest trait-factor theories in career development is that of Holland. According to Roth, Hershenson, and Hilliard (1970), Holland’s theory assumed that at the time a person chose his vocation, he was a product of his heredity and environment.

He believed that from our experiences we develop a hierarchy of habitual and preferred methods for dealing with necessary social and environmental tasks in our lives. This hierarchy directs us toward an occupational environment that will satisfy us. Holland developed six classes of occupational environments and six corresponding personal orientations, also called personality types. The six personality types are listed: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (cited in Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). There are numerous methods of measuring the Holland types of individuals and many of them are used today with college students to help assist them with careers. Instruments such as the Vocational Preference Inventory and the Self-Directed Search have been found successful in assisting students with occupational choices.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will include information on the subjects selected and the procedures used. In addition, the instrument used to collect information will be discussed as to its content, format, validity, and reliability. Data collection and analysis will also be reported. This chapter will conclude with methodological limitations.

#### **Subject Selection and Description**

The site selected for research was the University of Wisconsin-Stout, located in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Over 8,000 students are currently enrolled at the university. The subjects selected were enrolled in the class TRDIS-101-001 Seminar in Career Exploration during the fall 2002 semester. The purpose of the class is to help undecided college students with career exploration and to assist them with effective resources and guidance. The class consisted of 42 students, most of them freshmen. All of the students, most being undecided regarding a major and career choice, were in the class to explore careers.

#### **Instrumentation**

The instrument chosen for this research was the Career Decision Scale-CDS that is published by Psychological Assessment Resources, Incorporated. (Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico, & Koschier, 1976, Appendix A). The CDS developed from the idea that numerous problems prevent a large number of people from making vocational decisions. The CDS represents an estimate of career indecision and uncertainty.

The CDS is formatted in a four-page booklet including all items and ratings. Scoring is tabulated and recorded in the test booklet using four normative groups for calculation of percentile scores. Normative groups consist of high school and college students by sex and year of study. The CDS can be administered in group or individually. Depending on the reading level of the individual, the CDS can be completed in 10 to 15 minutes.

The CDS consists of 19 items with 18 of the items in a Likert format. The response scale is 4 “exactly like me”, 3 “very much like me”, 2 “only slightly like me”, and 1 “not like me” (Osipow et al., 1976). Items one and two represent components of the Certainty Scale (CS), which measure the degree of certainty a student feels regarding their decision about a major or career. CS scores at the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile or less would suggest that the test-taker has significant uncertainty about a career. Items 3 through 18 represent the Indecision Scale (IS). These are 16 independent items that measure career indecision. IS scores at or above the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile would indicate a serious level of indecision about a career (Osipow, 1987). Item 19 is an open-ended question that is not scored, however, it is very significant as it allows the test-taker to list other exceptional barriers in the decision-making process not represented in the scale items.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher attended the career class and administered the CDS to the entire class, which consisted of 42 students. Students were first asked to sign a consent form before the CDS was distributed (Appendix B). A brief introduction of the researcher and the rationale for the study was given by Dr. Shirley Murphy, the primary instructor of the

class. Consent forms were given to the researcher before completion of the CDS assessment.

After the students received booklets, the instructions were read aloud. Students were also informed the only information needed on the front of their booklet was their name, gender, and year in school. The researcher cautioned the students to carefully read each item and respond by circling one of the four numbers that best described them. Students were reminded to read the last question so they wouldn't ignore the open-ended question. All of the students completed the CDS within 15 minutes. Assessment booklets were collected by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 10.0 (SPSS). Crosstabulations were completed to compare male and female responses. Year in college and gender were also analyzed to clarify the difference between career decidedness according to year in college and gender. Individual comments for the open-ended questions were scrutinized and discussed more completely in Chapter 4.

Scores were tabulated for all 42 participants that completed the assessment. Scoring the Career Decision Scale (CDS) involved adding the total ratings for each of the two Career Decision Scales. A raw score was obtained for the CDS by adding the ratings from items one and two and then entering the total in the scoring box at the bottom of each assessment booklet in the heading Total 1-2 (Table 3.1). Scores for the IS was determined by adding items 3-18 and entering a total under the heading Total 3-18 at the bottom of the assessment booklet. At that time based on the raw scores obtained,

Table 3.1

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Scoring Box (Osipow, 1987)

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	Total 1-2	Total 3-18	Normative Group	%ile
Certainty Scale				
Indecision Scale				

---

appropriate normative group percentile scores for male and female college freshmen were obtained and recorded.

After calculations were completed the researcher examined the difference between certainty and indecision (Table 3.2). Using Table 2 gave hypotheses for Certainty and Indecision Scores. High Certainty Scale scores indicated certainty of choice of career and school major. Certainty Scale scores which are at the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile or less are considered significant suggesting that the student is uncertain about he selection of either career or major. High Indecision Scale scores would indicate indecision regarding career choice. Scores that were equal or exceeded the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile were considered significant, indicating a serious level of indecision.

### **Limitations**

A limitation that exists is that its reliability may not be measured. Only 42 students participated in the study. Having a larger pool of students would have been helpful to draw more accurate conclusions and for reliability. Another limitation in this study would be that the study was only conducted in one classroom at the University of Wisconsin-Stout; therefore it is limited in the generalizations that can be made to other areas of Wisconsin and the United States.

Additionally, limitations could be made from the CDS regarding the fact that many of the statements have more than one concept or idea. An example of this would be item number 15 which states, “So many things interest me and I know I have the

Table 3.2

## Interpretive Hypotheses for Certainty and Indecision Scores (Osipow, 1987)

	INDECISION			
		High >84 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Middle 16-84 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Low <16 <sup>th</sup> percentile
C E R T A I N T Y	High >84 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Possible invalid test data	Further need for assessment	Little felt need for intervention
	Middle 16-84 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Further need for assessment	Further need for assessment	Further need for assessment
	Low <16 <sup>th</sup> percentile	High likelihood of need for intervention	Further need for assessment	Possible invalid test data



ability to do well regardless of what career I choose. It's hard for me to find just one thing that I would want as a career." This statement involves both interests and abilities which may be completely different for an individual.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the data collected from the Career Decision Scale (CDS). A thorough explanation on how the data was organized and analyzed will be presented. Demographic information, item analysis, research objectives, and student comments are also addressed over the course of this chapter.

The body of this chapter will consist of three sections. The first section of this chapter describes the assessment demographics relating to the response rate and the number of participants surveyed. Section two consists of an examination of Research Objective 1 established at the beginning of the study which was to identify the demographic antecedents of career indecision that exists. Section three consists of an examination of Research Objective 2, which was to determine if there are commonalities in attitudes on education and occupational plans in college freshmen. Additionally, data will be analyzed according to gender to see if any differences exist. Data will be offered throughout descriptive measures, tables of frequencies, and percentages in support of the research objectives.

Finally, the last section of this chapter will offer comments from the participants from the final item number 19 of the assessment. While this open-ended item was not scored it was carefully considered as it was a chance for the participants to freely state any comments they had regarding their career decidedness. Summaries are presented and classified according to the participant's certainty of their career or college major as indicated in the open-ended item.

### **Demographic Information**

There were 42 surveys distributed to students in a Career Exploration Class at the University of Wisconsin-Stout and all 42 were completed and returned to the researcher for 100% response rate. Respondents consisted of 38 freshmen, three sophomores, and one junior. The 38 freshmen were made up of approximately 60% females and 40% males, 23 and 15 respectively. These freshmen made up approximately 90% of the total participants. The three sophomores were made up of approximately 66% males and 33% female(s), 2 and 1 respectively. These sophomores made up approximately 7% of the total participants. Finally, one junior, a male, made up approximately 2% of the total participants.

### **Descriptive Analysis of Objective One**

Research and data was gathered and analyzed to thoughtfully answer objective one which was to identify the demographic antecedents of career indecision that exists. Common demographic antecedents that existed were age and gender. Knowing this information while looking at commonalities from the antecedents illustrated the large degree to which indecision occurred. Having this information it was important to look at the scales used to gather the above data to draw further conclusions on indecision.

The Career Decision Scale (CDS) scores were divided into two measures, a Certainty Scale (CS) score and an Indecision Scale (IS) score. Surveys with high CS scores indicate a higher certainty of career and major choice in college, whereas, low CS scores indicate lower certainty. When obtaining a final score, a maximum score of eight and a minimum score of two would be recorded. The first two items of the CDS included the CS score. The results indicate a mean score of 1.67 for item one and 1.67 for item

two. From this information we can presume that majority of the students are undecided about what career or major is right for them.

The second part of the CDS was to reveal IS scores. High IS scores indicated higher indecision, while low IS scores indicated lower indecision of career and major choice in college. Items 3 through 18 consisted of the IS total scores having a maximum score of 64 and a minimum score of 16. The scores ranged between 20 and 54, and an average IS score of 36.38 was obtained. Looking at the maximum (64) and minimum (16), 40 would be then assumed as the middle of the two numbers. The statistics show that 31 of the 42 (73.8%) fell below what would be considered average indecision. Therefore, based on IS scores and percentages, the group overall had low indecision. While examination of the CS and IS scores did not reveal significant patterns of group indecision, the researcher can conclude from this data that overall the group had low certainty and low indecision with regard to career or choice of major in college.

### **Descriptive Analysis of Objective Two**

The second objective was to determine if there were commonalities in attitudes on educational and occupational plans in college freshmen. Additionally, data was looked at according to gender to see if any differences existed. Looking for patterns or commonalities in attitudes can further be explored by investigating the individual items that were used to define both CS and IS. The CS is comprised of Items one and two, while the IS is determined by the total score for Items 3 through 18.

Data indicates that 35 of the 42 participants (83.3%) of students surveyed marked one or two for their level of certainty in item one, which is supported in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

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Group Frequency Certainty Scale (CS) Scores: Item 1

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Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1.0	21	50.0	50.0	50.0
2.0	14	33.3	33.3	83.3
3.0	7	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	42	100.0	100.0	

---

Responses: 1 – not at all like me, 2 – only slightly like me, 3 – very much like me

Item one from the CS stated, “I have decided on a career and feel comfortable with it.”

Item two’s data was identical reporting the same level of certainty. The results, which are reported in Table 4.2, indicated an average group mode of one and an average group mean of 1.67. Conclusions from this data would then confirm that most students feel that this statement is not like them and that they have not decided on a career.

Item two from the CS stated, “I have decided on a major and feel comfortable with it.” The results from table 4.2 illustrated that the most frequently occurring mode for all items was a one while the average group mean was 1.67, supporting the data that most students feel that this statement is not like them and that they have not decided on a major. Overall, data from items one and two revealed that a majority of the participants had not decided on a career or major that they felt comfortable with.

Because we have already learned that indecision exists among college freshmen, it is important to look at patterns to better clarify what it is that makes college freshmen indecisive. Data was analyzed to determine gender differences in indecision. Item number 15 stated, “So many things interest me and I know I have the ability to do well regardless of what career I choose.” This item was the only one that significant of gender differences in attitudes on educational and occupational plans. With a significance of .041, female responses had a group mean of 2.67, while male responses had a group mean of 3.22; data is supported in Table 4.3.

Table 4.2

Commonalities in Attitudes on Educational and Occupational Plans		
Educational Statements	Mode	Mean
Item Number		
1. I have decided on a career and feel comfortable with it.	1	1.67
2. I have decided on a major and feel comfortable with it.	1	1.67
3. If I had the skills or the opportunity, I know I would be a _____ but this choice is really not possible for me.	2	2.17
4. Several careers have equal appeal to me. I have difficulty deciding among them.	3	2.79
5. I know I will have to go to work eventually, but none of the careers I know about appeal to me.	2	2.00
6. I'd like to be a _____, but I'd be going against the wishes of someone who is important to me if I did so.	1	1.43
7. Until now, I haven't given much thought to choosing a career. I feel lost when I think about it.....	2	2.24
8. I feel discouraged because everything about choosing a career seems so "iffy" and uncertain; I feel discouraged, so much so that I'd like to put off making a decision for the time being.	3	2.52
9. I thought I knew what I wanted for a career, but recently I found out that it wouldn't be possible for me to pursue it. Now I've got to start looking for other possible careers.	1	1.98
10. I want to be absolutely certain that my career choice is the "right" one, but none of the careers I know about seem ideal for me.	2	2.60

11. Having to make a career decision bothers me. I'd like to make a decision quickly and get it over with.	1, 3, 4	2.52
12. I know what I'd like to major in, but I don't know what careers it can lead to that would satisfy me.	2	1.95
13. I can't make a career choice right now because I don't know what my abilities are.	2	2.10
14. I don't know what my interests are. A few things "turn me on" but I'm not certain that they are related in any way to my career possibilities.	3	2.40
15. So many things interest me and I know I have the ability to do well regardless of what career I choose. It's hard for me to find just one thing that I would want as a career.	3	2.90
16. I have decided on a career, but I'm not certain how to go about implementing my choice.	1	1.71
17. I need more information about what different occupations are like before I can make a career decision.	3	3.02
18. I think I know what to major in, but I feel I need some additional support for it as a choice for myself.	2	2.00

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Responses: 4 – is exactly like me, 3 – is very much like me, 2 – is only slightly like me,  
1 – is not at all like me



Table 4.3

Gender Differences in Educational and Occupational Attitudes				
Educational Statements	Mean		t	Sig.
	Female	Male		
1	1.67	1.67	.000	1.000
2	1.75	1.56	.790	.434
3	2.04	2.33	-1.359	.182
4	2.58	3.06	-1.673	.102
5	2.08	1.89	.779	.440
6	1.29	1.61	-1.406	.167
7	2.29	2.17	.414	.681
8	2.42	2.67	-.803	.426
9	1.92	2.06	-.465	.645
10	2.42	2.83	-1.402	.169
11	2.38	2.72	-.965	.340
12	1.88	2.06	-.632	.531
13	2.04	2.17	-.523	.604
14	2.29	2.56	-.832	.410
15	2.67	3.22	-2.113	.041*
16	1.67	1.78	-.408	.685
17	2.96	3.11	-.559	.579
18	1.88	2.17	-.971	.337

\* p &lt; .05

## **Participant Comments**

The last section of this chapter describes comments that students wrote for item number 19, which was an open-ended question stating: 19) None of the above items describe me. The following would describe me better: (write your response below). A total of 37 out of 42 (88%) participants provided information that they believed would better describe their feelings regarding career uncertainty and indecision for item number 19. Comments were grouped according to their relevance to the topics addressed throughout the research study and labeled according to gender and year. The three areas address will be higher level of certainly of career choice or major, somewhat certain of career choice or major, and extreme uncertainty of career choice and major.

### **Higher Level of Certainty of Career or Choice of Major**

The first category addressed looked at higher levels of certainty of career choice and major. Eight of the 37 (21.6%) participants responded with certainty that they either knew what they wanted to do for a career or that they had declared a major. Comments included in this category:

1. “I am very interested in many careers that stem from my major. I want to take an in depth look at the careers within my major to figure out what they are all about.”
2. “I finally have figured out that I want to be a Spanish teacher- secondary level. Now I have to transfer to a different school where they offer this. I am having problems finding people with information about credit transfers and what classes to take.”

3. “I know what I would like to do, but I wouldn’t make much money doing it. I wouldn’t be able to support myself.”

4. “I know what my major is going to be. I don’t what future careers I could go into after I graduate.”

5. “A student who came to Stout for Graphic Design. My career goal is to design movie, magazine, and CD covers.”

6. “Some of the items fit me..... I have a pretty good idea of what I want to do, but the major is closed.

7. “Many ideas of what I want to do, mostly outdoors or physical. I do not want to sit in an office, I don’t what to work directly under someone, and I would also like to run things.”

8. “Very athletic, love kids, want to do something that involves lots of these things.”

### **Some Certainty of Career Choice and Major**

The next category of student comments was categorized as to a level of some certainty, but needs more information about careers or majors. Overall, participants were clear about their interests and abilities, but didn’t know exactly what they wanted to do. A total of 17 of the 37 participants (45.9%) responded with some certainty while needing additional information or career guidance. Comments included in this category:

1. “I have many different ideas of careers that interest me, but I don’t know if I would actually like them or not. I have skills and interests, but I don’t know if they fit a particular field.”

2. “I am a very outgoing person. I like to meet new people and be active. I am hardworking, honest, and friendly. However, I need additional information on what would be best for me.”

3. “I have a lot of interest in numerous fields, but am not quite sure which one to go with.”

4. “I have a few things in mind on what I want to do, but none of them are majors I know about.”

5. “I have a couple of choices about my career, but I do need some more information and I also need to know is my major at this college.”

6. “I have many ideas about possible careers, but no way to choose one. I need more information about them.”

7. “I have a few ideas of things I would like for a career. I’d like to follow someone around for a while just to see what it’s like, and I don’t know what majors lead to what I like.”

8. “I’m good at certain things and like to do certain things, but I don’t know if there are other things out there. I’m just trying to feel around.”

9. “I’m really excited about a career and school, but I just need some more time and information. What’s the rush I’m only a freshmen.”

10. “If I try my hardest in any field, I will succeed, except English. I have some areas narrowed down, but am uncertain about which way to turn.”

11. “I haven’t found a major that is perfect for me. If I could combine bits and pieces of several majors I could have a major for me.”

12. “Some of them describe me pretty good. However, every time I think I’m decided I get turned off for one reason or another.”

13. “I have a couple of ideas of what I want to do, but I don’t know how decide or if I can get into the major.”

14. “I have some ideas on what I should be doing, but I want to know what would suite me best for the long term.”

15. “I have a wide range of interests and it’s hard to stay focused on one specific major or career. I’m constantly being pulled in different directions.”

16. “The questions that I have answered describe me very well. I have all kinds of ideas of what I want to do or would or like to do, but I have no clue where to begin or how to pursue it. I really want to find the “right” job for me.”

17. “I have many interests, however, I want to find the job that interests me, but yet the pay is outstanding.”

### **Extreme Uncertainty of Career Choice or Major**

The final category was related to extreme uncertainty in career choice or major. Of the 37 participants surveyed, 12 (32.4%) participants responded that they were completely uncertain about what career or major they wanted to explore. Comments included in this category:

1. “I don’t know what career I want to pursue, I don’t know what jobs relate to my interests.”

2. “I don’t know what career I want to do. I have a couple of ideas, but I don’t know where to start. I would like to learn more about each career before choosing one.”

3. “I don’t really have any clue what I want to be. I have so many talents, but don’t know how to pursue them.”

4. “I have no idea what I would like to major in, I have many abilities but I don’t know what careers would incorporate them all.”

5. “None of the above describes me good. I don’t know what I should major in, but that okay for right now, it will eventually come to me.”

6. “I have no idea what I want to major in or what career path that I would like to take.”

7. “I’m not sure what I want to do and I don’t really know any of the possibilities.”

8. “I don’t have a clue what I want to do. I don’t know what majors lead to what careers.”

9. “I am a person who likes change and variety and I know any specific career that would give me that kind of flexibility.” I can’t get my mind to settle on one career goal or major.”

10. “I have an idea of what I might want to do with life, but I’m still not really sure about careers.”

11. “I have had several options for a career, but I’m not sure I’d be happy at one, could make a living at another and am uncertain about what to do.”

12. “I am undecided in what major I want to pursue. I feel that there are too many out there to just choose one.”

This chapter provided a detailed account of the results by conducting descriptive analyses on data collected as it related to the research objectives one and two.

Additionally, participant comments were grouped according to certainty level regarding career choice and major. The following chapter offers the researcher's interpretations of these results, conclusions of the study, limitations and implications. Finally, investigations of research objective three will be addressed to identify recommendations/interventions that will allow career counselors/advisors to better prepare students for life-long career decision planning.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

Those students who are undecided once they start their college education need to explore their options. No one can choose an alternative if they don't know that it exists, which is the case if a student is exposed to a limited number of options. Faculty, academic advisors, and counselors at both the high school and college level can help broaden students' academic horizons, as well as show them how to channel their skills and interests into a viable career choice. Schools need to be proactive in developing programs or groups which they can work within the curriculum.

Computers will continue to be a part of education and computer-based systems are being used to assist undecided students in gaining the knowledge that they need. This may be a good approach as it is also being utilized with the Career Exploration Class at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, but a follow-up should be done working with the student one-to-one to help the student with uncertainties or further direction in a selected career area.

Regardless of the type of assistance available, students should be encouraged to take advantage of it as soon as possible, as most schools would prefer you declare a major by the end of the second year. If students go beyond this point without declaring, it will take them longer than four years to complete a degree. It may also increase the risk that students will drop out of school before graduation.

Even if a major is declared, problems of indecisiveness may continue for many students. At this point, students need to sit down with a counselor/advisor to look at their



academic record and find out how their courses may apply to another area of study if they choose to change their major. It is very likely that students will change their major two or three times before finding a major that suits them.

### **Objective One Discussion**

The antecedents that existed in the study were age and gender. A majority of the participants were freshmen in college and either male or female. Data indicated males were more decided than females.

The first two items of the CDS included the CS score. The results indicate a mean score of 1.67 for item one and 1.67 for item two. From this information we can presume that majority of the students are undecided about what career or major is right for them. Looking at the second part of the CDS was to reveal IS scores. Data indicates that 35 of the 42 participants (83.3%) of students surveyed marked one or two for their level of certainty in items one and two. Conclusions from this data would then confirm that most students feel that this statement is not like them and that they have not decided on a career.

The statistics show that 31 of the 42 (73.8%) fell below what would be considered average indecision. Therefore, based on IS scores and percentages, the group overall had low indecision. While examination of the CS and IS scores did not reveal significant patterns of group indecision, the researcher can conclude from this data that overall the group had low certainty and low indecision with regard to career or choice of major in college.

### **Objective Two Discussion**

The second objective was to determine if there were commonalities in attitudes on educational and occupational plans in college freshmen. Additionally, data was looked at according to gender to see if any differences existed. Item number 15 stated, “So many things interest me and I know I have the ability to do well regardless of what career I choose.” This item was the only one that was significant in the context of gender differences in attitudes on educational and occupational plans.

### **Comments and Conclusions**

Overall, I would have to conclude from the collection of participant comments that majority of the students had career indecision to some extent. A great number of participants were aware of their many interests and the majors available on campus, but had a hard time finding the “right” or “best” career for them.

Conclusions could be made that men know they have the abilities to do well regardless, while women have more concerns about picking a career that makes the most sense for them. Traditions and patterns in our society may play a role in the uncertainty that some women continue to hold today. Therefore, this statement may be significant for many of the mentioned reasons.

Overall, when looking at the data, conclusions can be made from the relationship between career certainty and indecision that when one score is high, the other score is high and vice versa for low scores. The data collected shows that college freshmen have a high level of uncertainty and additionally some indecision about careers and choice of major in college. The level of uncertainty and indecision is based on one’s experiences, preparation before college, interests, and pressures from others. One may have a particular major declared, but will also have no idea what career would best suit them.

### **Relationship to Existing Research**

Many college freshmen take general education courses during their first year of college while participating in various activities to obtain knowledge and life experience prior to committing to a college major. As discussed in Chapter 2, originated from Holland's theory, it is assumed that at the time a person chose his vocation, he was a product of his heredity and environment. Therefore, it is believed that from our experiences we develop a hierarchy of habitual and preferred methods for dealing with necessary social and environmental tasks in our lives. This hierarchy directs us toward an occupational environment that will satisfy us (Roth et.al., 1970).

Many of the participants needed clarity on careers and wanted more knowledge about types of careers that can be obtained from college majors. As gathered by Super's studies of career development, this process of understanding careers can start by simple role modeling while one most participate in job shadowing. With this notion, Super believed that role modeling and observing further facilitated the development of the vocational self-concept

### **Recommendations for Counselors**

From the researcher's perspective it is extremely important to communicate with students about interests, experiences, and feelings regarding career uncertainty and indecision. As in any successful counseling relationship, effective communication is necessary when working toward goals and outcomes. Many individuals are often overwhelmed with the diversity of options and may experience pressure from other's in their lives, for high levels of achievement. Therefore, career guidance to help students clarify their feelings is necessary before providing any additional resources.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research include an additional study conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Stout that surveys a larger and more diverse student body to look at career uncertainty at the college level. Additionally, it may be interesting to use the Career Decision Scale with a class or program on campus that is decided on a major. This research could be gathered with undecided individuals in a career class on campus to look at comparisons between certainly levels.

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**APPENDIX A**

## **APPENDIX B**

October 30, 2002

To: Participants in the “Factors That Influence Career Uncertainty in College Freshman” Research Study.

I am currently a student in the School Guidance and Counseling Program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The research I am conducting examines factors that influence career indecision in college freshman. The goal of this study is to evaluate a survey that measures this as part of this study. Before completing the survey, I would like you to read and then sign this consent form indicating that you know the potential risks and benefits of participation, and that you understand your rights as a participant. If you have any questions, please contact Amber Sinz, the primary researcher, at (715) 483-3397.

### **RISKS**

This is no risk associated in filling out this survey.

### **BENEFITS**

The results of this study may be beneficial to instructors of the class and also students that desire feedback. Interpretations will help college preparation and career choices.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your answers are strictly confidential. Only the primary researcher will have access to the confidential raw data.

### **RIGHT TO WITHDRAW OF DECLINE PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about this research study should be addressed to Amber Sinz, the researcher, at (715) 483-3397, or Judy Rommel, the research advisor, at (715) 232-2394. Questions about the rights of the research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW – Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54741, phone (715) 232-1126.

I attest that I have read and understand the above description, including potential risks, benefits, and my rights as a participant, and that all of my questions about the study have



been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give my informed consent to participate in this research study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_